

Social enterprise and rural places of worship in England

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Improving rural lives together



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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Headlines | 3 |
| 2. Summary..... | 3 |
| 3. Context..... | 4 |
| 4. Approach | 4 |
| 5. Are there potential benefits of the social enterprise model for rural places of worship? | 5 |
| 6. Listing of rural social enterprises in places of worship | 7 |
| 7. Selection of case studies | 8 |
| 8. Key findings from the case studies | 9 |
| 9. Overcoming barriers and encouraging a greater take up of the social enterprise model..... | 17 |

Appendices

- A. Sources used to establish listing
- B. Listing
- C. Case Study summaries
- D. Case Studies in full
- E. Support available
- F. Summary of recommendations

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1. Headlines

- The examples of social enterprise researched as part of this project all had a positive impact on the long term sustainability of the place of worship. This was through increasing use, the generation of additional income and the involvement of a larger number of people.
- The needs of the wider community must be the starting point for considering the potential of a social enterprise. Solutions that are solutions for community needs and problems and not merely solutions for the problems of a place of worship are much more likely to be successful and sustainable.
- The benefits and wider impacts of a social enterprise extend beyond meeting the initial service need or resource provision.
- High quality advice, support and promotion are needed to ensure good practice is shared and built on.
- There are three challenges to address in the use of social enterprise in places of worship:
 - (a) The social enterprise should meet the community's needs and not be developed solely as a solution to problems of a place of worship;
 - (b) Recognising and addressing the tensions that may arise in using a spiritual place for secular purposes;
 - (c) The process for working through the planning system and listed building consent, including denominational systems.
- Practical steps are proposed to address these challenges, provide effective support and learning as well as promoting the social enterprise model.

2. Summary

This research uses a case study approach to consider whether social enterprise can be an effective method to assist the sustainability of rural places of worship. There are five full case studies and two shorter studies. In addition the first listing of social enterprise in rural places of worship has been compiled.

The work establishes that in all cases the presence of social enterprise has a positive impact on the sustainability of the place of worship. It shows that the needs of the wider community must be the starting point as solutions based on social enterprise need to service the needs of the community first and not the place of worship. The impacts of the enterprises go beyond that of merely providing a much needed service and include benefits such as increased volunteering, social interaction and improved community cohesion. The research shows that the higher quality the advice and support available the greater the chances that others can learn from the development, and an increased likelihood that the social enterprise model becomes a mainstream option for improving the sustainability of places of worship.

The research establishes that there are three main challenges to address. Firstly that any solution needs to be a community solution and recommendations need to reflect this. Secondly to recognise the tensions of using a spiritual place for secular purposes and thirdly to find better ways of working with all the different organisations and bodies that have responsibility and interest in the building.

Nine recommendations are made and they are all framed around the need to encourage social enterprise to be developed to solve needs and problems of the community first rather than being

created purely as a solution for sustaining a place of worship. They include addressing the tensions that can arise between use of a building for sacred and secular purposes, ways of facilitating the planning process, recommendations for more effective support, promoting the social enterprise model through targeted campaigns, maximising the use of the case studies and effectively influencing decision makers, funders and permission givers.

It is concluded that social enterprise has the potential to be an effective tool for improving the sustainability of rural places of worship.

3. Context

The aim of this research is to explore whether social enterprise can be an effective way of assisting rural places of worship to become more sustainable through extending their use by the wider community. This can help maintain a building in a good state of repair and improve its financial stability. In the context of this research the word 'community' is used to describe the whole population resident in a particular geographical settlement. The word 'congregation' is used to describe the regular users of a place of worship.

There are at least 15,000 rural places of worship in England and currently very few¹ are using social enterprise to help maintain and sustain their heritage. So the impact of social enterprise on places of worship is very limited currently.

Awareness of this option is also low. This is illustrated by recent initiatives such as the Big Lottery funded Village SOS Fund which offered support to rural communities wishing to solve problems through social enterprise. This programme ran from 2012-13 and generated over 1300 enquiries for social enterprise solutions, yet less than 20 came from places of worship. Since 2013, only one social enterprise is known to have been established within a place of worship – a pop-up shop in Bladon, Oxfordshire.

4. Approach

The research considers three questions:

Does social enterprise make places of worship more sustainable?

If it does then:

What are the challenges and barriers to the social enterprise model being more widely adopted?

And:

How can these challenges and barriers be overcome and what encouragement is needed to improve the uptake of the social enterprise model in rural places of worship?

The outputs are:

- The first listing of social enterprise in rural places of worship across England
- A set of five in-depth case studies and two shorter case studies to illustrate the potential of social enterprise and its challenges

¹ Before this research there was no evidence to quantify this number, estimates ranged from 10 to 30.

- A review of the existing advisory support and guidance
- Recommendations for further work.

5. Are there potential benefits of the social enterprise model for rural places of worship?

It is worth spending a few moments explaining the social enterprise model and how it works. Then consider the common problems faced by rural faith communities and their buildings and see whether social enterprise has the potential to solve any of these problems.

5.1. What is the social enterprise model?

Social enterprises are trading organisations with social and community objectives with any surplus used to fulfil social purposes. Terminology has shifted during the development of this research report from 'social enterprise' to 'community enterprise', 'community businesses' and 'community co-operatives'. These are mostly one and the same models but the particular model used by places of worship is community-based, community-owned and community-managed, meeting the needs of that community. Typically they emerge in response to identified community needs at the local level.

In rural areas community-owned village shops continue to be one of the leading success stories of the community-based social enterprise movement. There are currently 344² such shops set up by communities, often in response to the closure of the last village shop, to offer a range of products and services. 97% offer local food, 67% run the post office and 52% have a café/seating area. A typical community shop will have 30 volunteers each working 2-4 hours a week. Once set up they show great resilience; the businesses have a 96% success rate compared with a national UK business survival rate of 46.8%. With an estimated 400 commercial village shop closures each year, community shops replace 6% of all village shop closures. Regardless of the products and services sold an overwhelming message coming from all community shops is the important role that they play in stimulating community and social activity³.

Other examples of rural community-based social enterprises include community-owned cafes, heritage centres, land based initiatives as well as community-owned pubs, broadband and energy schemes. Social enterprises emerge as communities affected by a problem find that a social enterprise provides them with an effective and sustainable solution.

For an activity to be described as a social enterprise there are a number of key criteria that must be satisfied. The name itself highlights two of the key criteria. The activity must be a trading enterprise with ideally more than 50% of its income coming from trading.⁴ The activity must have a social purpose over and above that of raising income. The beneficiaries must be the wider community and not just individuals or a particular group. There needs to be a recognised social enterprise legal structure which recognises community ownership and democratic control. Finally once set up they are self-sustaining with any surplus profits being used to benefit the wider community.

²<http://www.plunkett.co.uk> 28th October 2016

³A Better Form of Business. Community-owned village shops. Plunkett Foundation 2015

⁴The Social Enterprise Mark uses the criteria that more than 50% of the activity's income must come from trading. This is a high bar not universally accepted and it has been used here as a guiding reference point.

There are many examples where small alterations to places of worship facilitate the introduction of new activities and roles. Typically these alterations might include installing a toilet and/or a kitchen area. These facilities can support new uses of the building and help with increasing the overall usage but by themselves they do not satisfy all the criteria above and cannot be considered a social enterprise solution. There are also examples of increasing the use of the building for wider community benefit include hosting of Post Offices, police community points, Citizens Advice Bureau and debt advice centres. These activities, whilst providing very valuable services, again cannot be considered social enterprises as they do not satisfy the criteria set out above.

To be considered a social enterprise for this research the activity needed to satisfy the following criteria.

| Activity | Criteria |
|--------------------------|---|
| Enterprising | The activity is trading and generating income |
| Social | The activity has a social purpose over and above raising income |
| Community | It benefits the wider community – not just individuals or the congregation |
| Self-sustaining | Once set up the enterprise is self-sustaining and does not rely on external funding to continue |
| Profits | Any profits are used to benefit the wider community and not just faith needs |
| Governance | Social enterprise legal structure which recognises community ownership and democratic control. |
| Place of worship | Connected to a building which is still in use as a place of worship |
| Rural and England | Are rural and located within England |
| Receptive and accessible | The enterprise is receptive to sharing information/experience and has a website/contact details |

5.2. What are the common problems faced by rural faith communities and their buildings?

Many of the estimated 15,000 rural places of worship in England are struggling to maintain their buildings particularly when they have high heritage value. The problems faced include a lack of funding and limited income, high maintenance costs of often historic listed buildings and a small number of people (often elderly) caring for and supporting the building. Additionally the building may only be used for a few hours each week. The building is likely to be difficult to heat with very high costs especially in winter, when an empty building needs warming up.

This situation is both a struggle and a challenge. The current economic situation has reduced the availability of funding streams and increased competition making it harder to sufficient funds, and means that new and effective solutions need to be considered. However, any development needs to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.⁵

⁵Government definition of sustainability. Mar 2012

5.3. Does social enterprise have the potential to solve any of these problems?

The social enterprise model offers a proactive approach that has the potential of making places of worship more sustainable.

By generating income from the business the enterprise is able to use these funds to support the church building and wider community needs. This means that places of worship are less reliant on grant funding or local fundraising.

By sharing the space costs can be shared too. The costs of maintenance and heating can be shared and large capital projects planned together. Although the exact nature of cost sharing will depend on whether a social enterprise leases space or if it is run by the church council. The enterprise itself involves the wider community and increases the activities going on within the building. This has the potential to increase the number of people who use the building and who go on to care about and actively support its upkeep. As a consequence there are increasing numbers who engage and care about the place of worship.

Social enterprise and faith groups have similar values when it comes to sense of community and their aims do not conflict with the ways in which faith groups operate.

Social enterprises with their mix of social and business objectives are in a unique position to combine the best of community approaches with the best of business approaches. In this way they can set up and run self-sustaining enterprises that solve local problems. They have the potential to make rural places of worship more sustainable.

| Problem | How social enterprise might help |
|---|---|
| Lack of income | Generate income |
| High maintenance costs | Sharing of costs |
| High running costs e.g. heating and insurance | Sharing of costs |
| Limited use of the building | Increased use of building |
| Small (and often elderly) congregation | Potential to increase the number of people who use the building |
| Few looking after the building | Increased number who engage and care |

6. Listing of social enterprises in rural places of worship

The first part of the research was to produce a list of as many examples of social enterprises in rural places of worship that could be found. There are known documented examples and there are listings from urban areas. There is no existing listing for rural areas which have different issues and benefit from being considered separately. The entrants came from the steering group members and their contacts, various other databases and published reports. These sources are listed in **Appendix A** and are a good reference point for future work.

Having identified possible contenders they were each sent a questionnaire as a means of checking their eligibility and gathering more information.

The resulting listing of known rural social enterprises is in **Appendix B**.

The search for known examples produced a listing of 38 enterprises across rural England. Of these 28 (73%) are in Church of England buildings and the remainder in buildings belonging to the

Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, Baptist Church and Roman Catholic Church. The search also endeavoured to find places of worship of other faiths but none were found.

Around 40% of the social enterprises identified are operating multi-use spaces and 30% are running shops and cafes. Three focus on tourism opportunities; other examples include a farmers' market, a cinema, a laundrette and youth projects. The research looked for examples of land based rather than building based examples but did not find any.

This is the first time such a listing has undertaken and it will almost certainly be incomplete. However it is the first attempt and a good starting point for the research.

7. Selection of case studies

The case studies were selected from the listing. They were selected by the steering group to reflect a range of types, ambitions, longevity and successfulness of social enterprises in places of worship. The following factors were taken into account to obtain a wide range of different case studies:

- good geographical spread across rural England
- type of rural location
- diversity of denominations and faiths
- whether the building was still in use as a place for regular worship
- the length of time the social enterprise has been in existence
- type of enterprise activity
- type of organisational structures
- size of project in terms of scale and ambition
- degree of alteration needed to the building.

The five case studies selected included examples of community-owned shops, community spaces, a heritage centre and a farmers' market. There are three in Church of England buildings, one in a Methodist Church and one United Reformed Church.

| Location | Place of worship | County | Activity |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Buckland Brewer | Methodist | Devon | Community-owned shop |
| Fernham | St Johns Church of England | Oxfordshire | Community space |
| Keld | United Reformed | Yorkshire | Community space/heritage |
| Shipbourne | St Giles Church of England | Kent | Farmers market |
| Yarpole | St Leonards Church of England | Herefordshire | Community-owned shop |

In addition two shorter case studies were selected to illustrate particular points. The enterprises are a very small community-owned shop and a laundrette.

| Location | Place of worship | County | Activity |
|-----------|-----------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Langford | St Giles Church of England | Essex | Community-owned shop |
| Camelford | St Thomas Church of England | Cornwall | Laundrette |

Summaries of the case studies can be found in **Appendix C** and the full case studies are in **Appendix D**.

It is recommended that the case studies are read before reading the remainder of the report. This will put the quotes and examples used in the report in context and help to bring the findings alive.

The selection of case studies was based on research carried out in 2012, which has not been updated subsequently. There would be benefit in further work being carried out to update this list and develop further case studies to assist with the promotion of social enterprise in rural places of worship.

8. Key findings from the case studies

There are a number of key findings emerging from the case studies, and the experiences of volunteers who developed and ran the projects.

8.1: In all examples the social enterprise has had a positive impact on the long term sustainability of the building: through increasing use, additional income generation and a larger number of people involved with the enterprise and the building.

8.2: The needs of the wider community must be the starting point for considering social enterprise in places of worship.

8.3: The impacts of the social enterprises go beyond merely providing a needed service or resource.

8.4: High quality advice, support and promotion, are needed to ensure good practice is shared and built on.

8.5: There are challenges to address:

- (a) The social enterprise should meet the community's needs and not be developed solely as a solution to problems of a place of worship;
- (b) Recognising and addressing the tensions that may arise in of using a spiritual place for secular purposes;
- (c) The process for working through the planning system and listed building consent, including denominational systems.

8.1 Sustainability of the Building

Social enterprise has a positive impact on the long term sustainability of the building

Crucially all of the social enterprises studied in this research have had a positive outcome for the building. The use of the building has substantially increased and the condition of the fabric of the building has been improved. As a result the care of the building is less of a burden and has also been put on a more sustainable footing as more people are involved in the care of the building.

In all cases the outcome is that the **building** is much better used.

Place of worship in use 7 days a week

Yarpole church is used 7 days of week for the shop, café and community space in addition to its use for worship. The church at Buckland Brewer will be open 6 days a week for the community-owned shop and open for services on Sundays.

For many of the projects the outcome has been improvements to the condition of the **fabric and management of the building**.

Roof refurbishment with enterprise conversion

The community space conversion at Fernham was done alongside a major fabric project to repair the roof. The church warden took charge of a major roof refurbishment and Project Inspire (the enterprise organisation) handled the conversion. The two projects benefited from the vision and energy created by the overall scheme and each added value to the other.

The outcome is that the **long term care** of the building is more assured by the presence of these social enterprises.

Charitable trust responsible for place of worship

At Fernham "Project Inspire", a charitable trust, now has responsibility for the routine maintenance of the church building (for a period of 30 years). The Parochial Church Council pays to hire the building for its services and other church activities such as weddings and funerals.

Generating sufficient surplus to keep buildings up to date

"The hope we have is that by giving buildings a kind of refurbishment – a notional life of 25 to 30 years – what we want to do is to generate sufficient revenue surpluses over those 25 to 30 years that will allow us to undertake on-going refurbishment and keep the buildings up to date and contemporary. We do not want to be faced with the problem we currently face of having responsibility for buildings which are time expired and maybe structurally lovely but inside quite grim and therefore the only way you can refurbish it is by raising hundreds of thousands of pounds. That in itself is a great challenge and I don't see it getting easier in the future". Company Secretary, Keld Resource Centre.

In all cases the outcome is that the **income from the social enterprise helps support the upkeep of the building**. The income may take the form of rental, it may come from sharing the costs of utility or other expenditure, or it may be direct income from the surplus profits of the enterprise.

Regular income for place of worship

The Farmers Market at Shipbourne generates an annual income of £7,000 a proportion of which goes to church improvements. An additional £2,000 is raised from stalls run by the church and this goes straight to church funds. All this has been achieved from initial set up costs of £500.

The final outcome is that the long term sustainability of the buildings is improved because through the social enterprise the number of people who have an attachment to and interest in the place of worship has increased. This leads to **more support for upkeep**. All of those interviewed for the case studies emphasised this point and recognised that more people with an attachment to the building meant more involvement, help, volunteering and financial support.

More people supporting the place of worship

The congregation at Yarpole is clear that it is not about '*more bums on seats at services*'. For them, what is important is that more people are coming into the building and they are starting to value it and appreciate it. And crucially, they are starting to '*own it*'.

There is now a wider support-base for the building of St Giles Langford. There are more people from the village visiting and some have now become '*Friends of St. Giles*' keen that

it should be kept for future generations. There has also been an increase in the number of people attending events in the church. Those who do not normally come to church now feel that they have 'ownership' of the building as part of their community.

8.2 Needs of the wider community

The needs of the wider community are the starting point

The needs of the wider community are the starting point. And solutions need to be community solutions and not solely for the place of worship

It is important to stress that all of the projects have sought to address community issues. It is the needs of the wider community that provide the stimulus for the project rather than solely the needs of the place of worship. These enterprises have arisen because of this wider agenda and through working in partnership with other community organisations. As a result the outcome for the place of worship has been improved sustainability.

Place of worship as meeting place

Two factors came together at Fernham. The village lost its meeting place and the church was little used with an elderly congregation of half a dozen or less. *"There was acknowledgement at the civil Parish Meeting that if they didn't look after the church, it would probably be lost and there was a general feeling that that would be a great shame because it's a historic and attractive building. The impetus came from the recognition that refurbishing the church to provide a village space was going to solve two problems at once."*

"It was a village project in close association with the church, rather than the other way round". Chairman of "Project Inspire".

Community focus and supporting livelihoods

For Shipbourne the objective was to provide a focus for the community (which had been lacking since the closure of the last village shop in 1981) and a retail outlet for small local producers who were undergoing hard times.

In some examples the place of worship was neither the first choice nor the obvious choice as a location for a needed service. Yet once decided upon the advantages and opportunities become apparent.

Place of worship not obvious choice

At Buckland Brewer four premise options for the community shop were considered and it was a year into the project before the Methodist Church was approached. The original thought was to see if a Portacabin could be sited on church land. In fact the congregation were interested in leasing the vestry as shop premises. *"Locating a shop in a church was a little bit of a surprise for me and certainly when I started out I didn't think it was an option".* Chair of the Buckland Brewer Community Shop Management Committee.

The case studies highlight the importance of partnerships and seeing the bigger picture. These partnerships bring rural communities together and create community solutions. The outcome of careful partnership working is to solve community problems and those faced by places of worship.

Village partnership at Yarpole

It was part of the project team's overall strategy that the use of the village hall was not jeopardised and from the beginning, a good working relationship was built up which has been maintained. The village hall, although slightly outside the centre of the village, already had fixed regular night bookings, while the church could be more flexible. The village hall and church have continued to work closely together to ensure limited conflict over bookings and a single booking ledger for both venues has allowed complementary events to be planned.

Partnership between place of worship and village pub

At Shipbourne, there is clear partnership between the church and the pub next door. The church work very closely with the Chaser Inn, and without their help especially providing parking for the stall holders, they would not be able to operate. The Church does not have any toilets, but the pub opens theirs to people visiting the market. This partnership works to mutual benefit, as the Chaser Inn benefits financially by being able to offer a 'Farmers Market Breakfast' and the Market benefits from the provision of parking and the Shipbourne pound. *"Our stallholders are too small to use individual card machines so we have printed our own Shipbourne pounds. These may be purchased with credit/debit cards at the Chaser Inn and then spent in the market (and at the Chaser Inn). The Chaser buys the money from us and we reimburse the stallholders. Working with the pub next door means we are creating a 'hole in the wall' service – or, more like, a 'hole in the bar service'".*

8.3 The impacts of the social enterprises go beyond merely providing a needed service or resource

The impacts of the social enterprises go beyond that of merely providing a needed service or generating income for the place of worship.

Additional outcomes

Two additional outcomes are the creation of employment and / or volunteering opportunities and improved social cohesion for the community.

Yarpole's vision to promote community cohesion and offer volunteering opportunities

Some of the key objectives at Yarpole were to reduce isolation, promote community cohesion and offer a wide range of training and volunteering opportunities and if possible to generate employment. Today in total the enterprise has created 5 part-time jobs and over 40 people volunteer regularly. *"There are a lot of people whose lives have been transformed by the volunteering opportunities that have come up – there were one or two who were not very healthy and who are now bright and lively and are enjoying life".*

Social add-ons at Camelford

The aim is to serve the community by meeting two important needs: providing a laundrette and creating a meeting place. A very important part of this project is to offer what are described as 'social add-ons'. Users of the laundrette have access to Citizen's Advice sessions, advice on money management, housing and healthy eating. Craft groups will also be offered to help build up people's self-confidence.

One enterprise leads to another

All the social enterprises in this study have developed plans for the future which aim to improve the viability of the enterprise itself and the sustainability of the building. For some this involves introducing toilets and kitchens. For others setting up the enterprise has given them the confidence to go on to do more. One outcome of the creation of a social enterprise in the building is that it becomes a stepping stone for other ways of improving the sustainability of the place of worship.

Café following shop

The setting up of a community-owned shop at Buckland is already inspiring the Methodist congregation to do other things in the building such as running a café.

New Facilities

At both St Giles Langford and St Giles Shipbourne plans are being developed to install toilets and kitchens in the church which will increase the potential use of the building.

Car parking and events marquee area at Fernham

A small area of Glebe land has been made available for use as a car park. This will improve access and it is hoped the building will become a venue for business seminars. A tentative third stage of the project is to make a space in the churchyard for a marquee where wedding breakfasts or buffet meals could be held.

8.4 Promotion, advice and support

The better the promotion, advice and support that is available – the greater the chances that others can follow the lead.

All case studies acknowledged the advice and support they had received from social enterprise infrastructure bodies such as the Plunkett Foundation and from within the sector itself via peer to peer learning, as critical to their success. However, the type and volume of support is inconsistent around the UK and over time, as support is mostly funded as part of geographically and time limited projects. Village SOS, for example was rare in that it supported communities across the UK, but its support was short-lived and only available for 18 months initially. Since then, many programmes have come and gone such as *The Enterprise Hub* (2009-14), *Making Local Food Work Enterprise Support* (2008-13), *My Community Rights* (2013-15), and others are beginning their journey including *The Power to Change Trust Market Place* and *The Hive*. Backed by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Plunkett Foundation has established a core advisory service for rural community owned enterprises and this is funded by multiple projects such as those above that are time limited, geographically and sectorially restricted. This still results in patchy and inconsistent support, but it does enable communities to access one window of support and then be referred on to the most relevant projects and partners at that time.

Where can communities can receive generic social enterprise support from?

What can be said at the current time is that there is no dedicated support for social enterprises setting up or running in rural places of worship, but communities can receive generic social enterprise support from organisations like the Plunkett Foundation and seek tailored guidance from established enterprises already running in places of worship.

The social enterprise sector has a strong record of peer to peer support whereby existing enterprises are willing to help newcomers and let them learn from their experiences.

Learning from others

In putting our plan together we have looked closely at the example of other community shops, spoken to the previous shop owner about the potential market and continued a conversation with the community about what the shop can bring to the parish'. Buckland Brewer Community Shop

Social enterprise solutions can help make places of worship more sustainable.

The case studies illustrate that social enterprise can make places of worship more sustainable through increasing use, additional income and a wider pool of people who care about and are involved in the upkeep of the building. The building becomes more sustainable through community solutions and those focused solely on the building. The social enterprise model is proven and already working effectively within rural communities and in places of worship.

It is important to note that this option is not easy or applicable for all places of worship, but there is enough evidence to support the finding that social enterprise can offer opportunities to help in the sustainability of these heritage buildings.

The next section considers the main barriers that have been identified. Section 9 then looks at the practical steps that need to be taken to overcome these barriers and encourage a greater uptake of the social enterprise model in places of worship.

8.5 There are challenges to address

This research has identified three key challenges:

- (a) The social enterprise should meet the community's needs and not be developed solely as a solution to problems of a place of worship;
- (b) Recognising and addressing the tensions that may arise in of using a spiritual place for secular purposes;
- (c) The process for working through the planning system and listed building consent, including denominational systems.

Challenge 1: The need for a community not solely a place of worship solution

It cannot be stressed enough that for social enterprise to be effective in making rural places of worship more sustainable, solving the problems and providing for the needs of the community must be the objective, rather than merely trying to address the problems of the building in isolation.

When faith and community are working in partnership the benefits and opportunities are realised for both. The community gets a needed service and the place of worship improves its sustainability through increased usage, sharing of maintenance costs and a larger pool of individuals for whom the building matters.

The challenge is to find ways to make this happen. It means promoting the ideas to both faith group and the wider community. It means encouraging the ideas of community planning and ensuring that places of worship are recognised as potential locations for community services.

Some of the enterprises came directly out of formal community planning processes (Shipbourne and Yarpole). Others evolved through more informal community engagement. All held public meetings, carried out consultations and worked hard to get the support of the community. In the case of Keld, the process took a year.

The Parish Plan at Yarpole

"It has been very much a community-wide project. The management of the Parish Plan, by the Parish Council and others, started this process by achieving about 65% of community involvement in it in some way or the other through questionnaires, special interest groups and other aspects of the community and finally a huge exhibition was held in the church which included an enormous scale model of the parish. When proposals were being developed to put the shop in the church, this idea was used again and an exhibition of the proposals was put up in church as a way of getting people used to the idea of using the church for secular use".

It means recognising that the availability of other community buildings need not always preclude social enterprise options if places of worship can find ways of working with others, identifying the strengths of each building and using them accordingly. For some places of worship social enterprise options may be limited because of their location within the village, their high historical and architectural importance and the availability of other community buildings.

Challenge 2: Using a sacred space for secular activities

This is still very much a live issue as there are different perspectives on how a place of worship can be used. There are those in the congregation and indeed outside it, who are very uncomfortable about a place of worship being used for income generating activities or enterprise. There are also those who for a wide range of reasons may find it difficult to enter a place of worship. Empowering Design Practices is a research project that aims to encourage the use of community led design for historic places of worship.⁶ The intended outcome of the project is to create more open, vibrant and sustainable places of worship that respect and enhance their heritage. The project is currently developing resources to assist those with responsibility for historic places of worship to involve the whole community in vision and planning.

Getting people used to the idea of enterprise activities in a place of worship

The community-owned shop is located in the vestry at Buckland Brewer. Two individuals had been running a monthly event in the vestry where they sold local produce and bric-a-brac. Whilst this did not make a large amount of money, it had the effect of encouraging people to get used to the concept of using the vestry as a shop and meeting place.

Sharing sacred space and community space at Yarpole

The group were aware that they needed to ensure that they brought the wider community along with them. They talked it through carefully with the local clergy team and PCC. They also ensured it was discussed at the public meetings and once the decision had been made, more meetings were organised in the church itself. Thought was given at the start of the project to ensure that the shop would be able to operate independently during services without interrupting them. However, as time has gone on, the approach has evolved and now there is a feeling that there is no need to physically separate the community shop from the sacred space. Ensuring that the shop's opening times do not overlap with service times has proved a more effective way of managing this issue.

Similarly, a lot of time was spent discussing whether or not to create a physical separation between the chancel and the nave. Some including the archdeacon did not think this was necessary, while others wanted to erect a glazed screen. Now that the shop has been open for several years, the need for a physical separation is no longer thought necessary. There is also a realisation that through wanting to preserve the sacred space, they have has

⁶ [Empowering Design Practices website](#)

ended up neglecting the chancel which now feels disconnected from the rest of the building.

Shared space at Fernham

"We are also getting used to the building being both a community space and a place of worship. For example, the Burn's Night took place on a Saturday night and yet by 9am next morning, everything was 'facing front' ready for Morning Worship with all signs of the previous night's celebration gone. It is a hugely adaptable space and that's what we wanted to achieve".

All the examples also talk of the opportunities for mission and attracting new members to the congregation.

New ways of being church

At Keld: *"Our mantra is 'it's all about new ways of being church"*

"This project involves local Christians willing to sacrifice short-term gains in pursuit of long-term goals; it has maintained a Christian presence in a rural area from which other denominations have gradually retreated; it has been given significant amounts of public funding to provide benefits for residents and visitors. It proves that with thought and patience, ancient church buildings need not be a liability but can become a constructive part of Christian mission". (Chairman of the Board of the Keld Resources Centre Ltd)

Langford as place of comfort

There are also people who now come in on a regular basis who, while they don't necessarily come to worship, find it a place of comfort. *"They can come in for a chat; they can have a cup of coffee and just benefit from human contact which is really what it was all about".*

All of the case studies recognise the tensions and the opportunities and have done their best to address them.

Challenge 3: Working with the planning system

Over half of those interviewed expressed real frustration with their dealings with various aspects of the different planning systems, bodies and statutory consultees that have to be negotiated. It was felt that these bodies could be unsupportive of the proposed initiatives and failed to recognise that an attempt was being made to find practical solutions to sustain a building. For some groups the process had felt isolating with a feeling that some bodies exercised power without taking wider responsibility for the future of the building. Some also felt that some bodies were not always realistic about the challenges being faced by those on the ground. For some, rather than being a constructive dialogue with the aim of finding a balanced solution, it became a difficult and painful process.

Where places of worship have small, perhaps elderly congregations, it can be very difficult to manage all the needs of a heritage building and cover the associated costs. If the care of these buildings is to be put on a more sustainable basis for the future there has to be a renegotiation of what can be permitted within the building. The gap can be too wide between the realities faced by a congregation and those seeking to preserve as much as possible of the heritage of a place of worship. These tensions would benefit from being addressed honestly at local, regional and national levels so that it is easier to find a balance in individual cases.

Finding practical ways of satisfying these different objectives so that places of worship can be kept in active use is important and is supported by Government policy.

“Government policy on the management of change relating to historic buildings and archaeology is intended to achieve the conservation of the historic environment and heritage assets (e.g. listed buildings) so that they can continue to contribute to the quality of life of this and future generations. It contains a presumption in favour of the protection of heritage assets from unnecessary demolition or unsuitable or insensitive alteration, **while also recognising that historic buildings should be kept in active use and that this may involve change.**”⁷

9. Overcoming barriers and encouraging a greater take up of the social enterprise model

This section considers the practical steps that need to be taken if there is to be an increased development of social enterprises in places of worship. These practical steps include finding ways to overcome the three barriers identified above and propose initiatives to make the processes easier, as well as ensuring that there is good promotion of the existing examples so that others are inspired to follow.

The practical steps needed are,

- 9.1. To identify and encourage community led solutions
- 9.2. Addressing the tension between use of a place of worship for enterprise
- 9.3. How to improve the facilitation of the planning process
- 9.4. Effective support for volunteers running the projects
- 9.5. Learning from other social enterprise sectors
- 9.6. Promoting and advocating the social enterprise model (including within denominational structures)

9.1 To identify and encourage community solutions

The research has identified that the needs of the wider community should be the starting point for any social enterprise project. Whilst social enterprise can support the social and financial sustainability of places of worship, there has to be a need for the enterprise activity to begin with. Once a need for a social enterprise is established from the community, and a place of worship is being considered to host the activity, a partnership approach between congregation and community must be adopted to ensure project success.

R1: Guidance material produced to support the development of social enterprise in places of worship must emphasise the importance of establishing community need and creating a partnership between congregation and community.

⁷ *New Work in Historic Places of Worship* (Second Edition) by Historic England 2012 [Historic England - new work in places of worship publications web page](#)

9.2. Addressing the sacred/secular tension

R2: A roundtable event involving relevant bodies with an interest in places of worship and social enterprise is recommended to continue the debate regarding the spiritual, social and cultural implications concerning wider community use and the long term sustainability of places of worship. This approach would benefit from a clear theological articulation of the issues to act as a framework and offer guidance. Such an event could explore some of the challenges that local communities experience, how communication between a place of worship and its permission-granting authority could be improved, and begin to develop guidance that could help future communities with this process. The debate would provide a clear guidance to position places of worship as a realistic and achievable solution to meet the needs of both community and faith group, while at the same time providing long term sustainability for the buildings.

R3: It is also recommended that this report has a formal well publicised launch through a 'social enterprise within places of worship' awareness-raising event. The main findings of the report could be presented and a couple of the projects invited to give short presentations. Invitees could include representatives of all denominational bodies, statutory and amenity groups as well as supporter and resource organisations such as Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre, the Plunkett Foundation, ACRE, Locality etc. Costs would be limited to venue hire and refreshments. This event could be delivered through partnership with the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance.

9.3. How to improve the facilitation of the planning process

All places of worship have a number of bodies with responsibilities and interests in the building. The case studies suggest that a better way of conducting the process of agreeing physical changes to buildings needs to be found. Reaching a balance between the needs of the congregation, community and heritage has to be the objective. It is important to note that the type of physical alterations required for social enterprises to function are often the same as adaptations to places of worship made for other reasons. Reconciling these competing interests requires concerted effort in order to ensure the sustainability of places of worship.

R4: It is acknowledged that useful guidelines have been produced by some of those organisations with responsibilities for and interest in the heritage value of places of worship, for those who wish to make physical alterations to their building. However, there is perhaps room for improvement and to make the guidance more user-friendly and more easily accessible. Ideally guidance on making changes to places of worship should be clear and understandable and communicate clearly the reasons behind particular approaches for a building. Each stage of the process should be outlined and explained. This could include promoting better use of the existing tools such as the Statements of Significance and Need. Involvement of the decision making authorities in the roundtable event (R2) would clearly inform and aid R4.

9.4 Effective support

9.4.1 Information and Guidance

A review of the existing advisory support and guidance has indicated a reasonable level of existing support for social enterprise in terms of written guidance, and community and business support. There is also written guidance specific for places of worship, for example, addressing specialist denominational issues and dealing with the relevant authorities. **Appendix E** lists the support currently available. However, there is nothing specific for social enterprise partnering with places of worship and much of what does exist is scattered and not easy to find. There is no need to recreate any of this material, or advisory support where appropriate provision is already available, but what is missing is a single access point for communities seeking guidance.

R5: It is recommended that a “first port of call/one stop shop” webpage or microsite be constructed specifically to cover the development of social enterprises within places of worship. Depending on funding available, and maintenance requirements, this could be a standalone website or a microsite on an existing website. For example, Plunkett hosts multiple microsites on its main website for specific enterprise types and models such as [Plunkett Foundation - community shops web page](#)

It is recommended that this proposed website or microsite:-

- I. provides a short introduction which would include an historical context, and offers a theological framework as recommended in R2.
- II. provides an overall summary of what is involved and so offer an easy starting point for anyone considering the options. It would reiterate the fact that it is vital that the project meets the need of the community and not just the needs of the place of worship (R1).
- III. would host the listing, case studies and a link to this report.
- IV. would stress that faith groups will need to seek advice from a wide range of sources. This would include their own faith groups, but also experts in the fields of social enterprise, historical buildings, neighbourhood and community planning, governance and legal.
- V. include a short guidance in the form of ‘top tips/checklist’ on obtaining permission for alterations and sign-posting to where specific guidance can be found.
- VI. would signpost to existing resources, funding and advisory support already available elsewhere.

9.4.2 Financial

Availability of finance is also critically important. This may be in the form of grants, loans, community investment or community fundraising but is more likely to be a combination of two or more sources. The need to approach a number of different types of funder, for example faith-based funders, community funders or those which target historic building conservation, is time-consuming and repetitive and therefore ways of streamlining the processes or pooling knowledge would be welcomed.

R6: It is recommended that a more effective knowledge bank of potential sources of funding is curated and that places of worship are encouraged to think broadly about where they might access support and funding for social enterprise projects.

The Heritage Lottery Fund’s fourth Strategic Framework (2013-2018) placed new emphasis on enabling those who are responsible for historic buildings to achieve ‘greater resilience by building partnerships or creating new opportunities to diversify income generation’. To support this, HLF launched a series of new funding streams and made changes to their existing targeted places of worship grant programme (Grants for Places of Worship). Further changes have been implemented at the mid-point of the Strategic Framework, including the launch of Resilient Heritage, a programme that provides funding to organisations that wish to build their capacity or implement strategic changes that will improve the management of their heritage. Grants can fund activities to help organisations acquire new skills or knowledge, or consider new models of governance or leadership aimed at increasing long term sustainability.

R7: It is recommended that the availability of grants to support capacity building and new models of working is promoted to those caring for places of worship in order to encourage and support the setting up of social enterprises in places of worship. It is recommended that case studies illustrating examples where places of worship have successfully accessed HLF funding for social enterprise projects are made readily available.

It is also recommended that when explaining the scope of the Grants for Places of Worship programme and its objective of 'helping to make these buildings more sustainable in the future' reference is made to the potential of social enterprises.

9.5 Awareness Raising

It is vitally important to get the message out that social enterprise can be an effective way of sustaining rural places of worship. This message needs to go to the wider rural community and organisations providing support in this area and not just the faith community. Influencing decision makers, funders and permission givers is key to increasing the uptake of social enterprise in places of worship.

Whilst Plunkett and G:ARC welcome the steps taken by HLF outlined in the Strategy Framework, and welcome the funding that has been made available, they note that the new funding streams have a broad remit and are not targeted at the use of social enterprise in places of worship, which means there may be significant competition for this resource. Without a targeted marketing campaign running alongside the new and updated initiatives in the current Strategic Framework, it is possible that the potential to use these programmes to create and support social enterprises within places of worship will not be fully utilised i.e. faith-based communities may remain ignorant of the potential to set up a social enterprise within their place of worship and non-faith-based communities may not realise that funding is available to support the creation of social enterprises in their local place of worship.

In contrast, the Village SOS project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, is a useful model to consider in terms of joining up a strategy. The Big Lottery Fund launched a grant programme in 2009 which they managed themselves to stimulate the growth of a wide range of rural community enterprises. As part of the programme, they commissioned Plunkett and a network of partners to deliver a grass roots publicity campaign consisting of events and communications to raise awareness of the role of rural community enterprise and to provide an advice line to support communities to plan their projects. The result was that Plunkett and their partners were able to create a healthy pipeline of applicants coming forward with Village SOS projects that met the strategic aims of the Big Lottery Fund.

R8: A national awareness raising campaign is recommended promoting the social enterprise model within places of worship. The campaign would be targeted at grass root level communities who are seeking to address known challenges they are facing (R1), as well as targeting denominational bodies and other faith groups. The campaign would make use of this report, the listing, the case studies, and the theological guidance for combining enterprise with places of worship. A roadshow of inspirational seminars could also demonstrate the potential for social enterprise to benefit both buildings and communities are recommended

At a very basic level, there is significant value in promoting at least the case studies to explain the possibilities offered by social enterprise, for the benefit of both the community and the sustainability of the place of worship. Inspiring people by telling good stories with good photographs can be done by sharing the case studies in this report on as many websites as possible.

9.6 Learning from other social enterprise sectors

It is worth looking at relevant learning from the social enterprise sector to see how the experiences and perspectives can inform the practical steps suggested here.

The Plunkett Foundation sees the development of social enterprise sectors as going through three distinct phases. The first is the pioneer phase where a small number of enterprises emerge each

breaking new ground and requiring high levels of entrepreneurship and commitment. After a time the second phase can emerge, the “gaining momentum” phase. Here others start to learn from the early examples and gain the confidence to give enterprise a go. In the final phase “mainstreaming” the model is now well established and there are clear guidelines and processes. There is no way to shortcut these phases but that the level of awareness, and appropriate support available can dramatically affect how long it will take to go through each phase.

A very good example comes from the community owned shop sector. This sector is now in the “mainstreaming” phase with 344 shops currently trading and about 20 opening every year⁸. 10 years ago, however, it was at the “pioneer” stage with a small number of early adopters. Public awareness of the community shop model was heightened when Radio 4’s The Archers opened a community-owned shop in Ambridge, but it was the contribution made by the Esmee Fairbairn that had the greatest impact in progressing the sector from 'Pioneer' phase through to 'gaining momentum' and 'mainstreaming'. Esmee supported Plunkett to run a dedicated community shop programme, the Village Core Programme, which supported the opening of over 90 shops within six years and supported a further 90 to open with advisory support within the same period.⁹ The programme provided advisory support (funding sourced by Plunkett from multiple sources) combined with a £20,000 grant (funded by Esmee Fairbairn) and matched loan funding (funded by Co-operative and Community Finance). The programme acted as a long term anchor fund which attracted communities to Plunkett for start-up advice, and gave Plunkett time to develop additional income streams to develop the depth of that service to community shops. As a result, Plunkett became a 'one stop shop' for all community shop needs and has enabled Plunkett to continue promoting and mainstreaming community ownership as a solution for communities without access to a village store.

Currently, the co-operative pubs sector is in the ‘gaining momentum’ phase with 44 pubs known to be trading. The sector is on the brink of becoming “mainstream” following the launch of a dedicated pubs programme ‘More than a Pub’ funded by the Power to Change Trust which provides a combination of awareness raising, business and community support, and a finance package consisting of grant and loan finance.

Whilst it is very difficult to predict the timescale for the development of social enterprise within places of worship, it is unlikely that the 'gaining momentum' phase will be reached without a targeted and concerted effort made by relevant organisations.

R9: It is therefore recommended that a partnership is developed between organisations with experience of social enterprise and varying denominational interests to work up a bespoke funding and advisory support programme that will increase the take up of social enterprise in rural places of worship.

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⁸A Better Form of Business. Community-owned village shops. Plunkett Foundation June 2012

⁹ Village CORE Programme.